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Emotion, Relevance and Consolation Arguments

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Title: Emotion, Relevance and Consolation Arguments
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There is a kind of argument offered to console people who are sorry or depressed, to the effect that they should not feel so badly because others are even worse off. In such arguments, B tries to console A for A's suffering on the grounds that some other person or persons, C, have suffered equally bad things or even worse. Here, A and B may be the same person: people sometimes seek to console themselves. The point is to diminish A's grief on the grounds that he or she is not alone in feeling it. If a person is grieving from having lost a job, well, there are others who have had the similar experiences or worse; they may have lost several jobs or never had a decent job in the first place. If she has been diagnosed with an illness requiring unpleasant lifestyle restrictions well, many other people are ill and many have worse diseases – terminal illnesses characterized by severe physical pain, for instance.

I have often played the role of A in this scenario and that of B, and who knows, perhaps I have, without knowing it, played the role of C as well. Many in the audience could probably report the same thing, since Consolation Arguments of this type are rather common. A recent item circulated on the Internet and forwarded to me by David Hitchcock included the following, among others:

Should you despair over a relationship gone bad, think of the person who has never known what it's like to love and be loved in return.

Should your car break down, leaving you miles away from assistance, think of the paraplegic who would love the opportunity to take that walk.

Should you find yourself at a loss and pondering what is life all about, asking what is my purpose, be thankful. There are those who didn't live long enough to get the opportunity.

A kind of *reductio* can be generated from such arguments. If one person's grief should be obviated whenever someone else has suffered equally or more, then only the worst-off sufferer is entitled to feel sad.

My interest in Consolation Arguments arises in part from personal experience, my experience being that I have some tendency to offer such arguments to myself and others and occasionally experience them as somewhat consoling but more typically find them frustrating and rather patronizing. The latter was certainly my response when – just after I had presented an earlier version of this paper to a small audience -- the Philosophy Editor for a major publisher dismissed my anxiety and unhappiness about a title for a new book. I had made many counter-suggestions to their desired title, which I despised. But the company would not move. She told me that it was no matter for grief: tragedy lay not here but in the killing fields of Rwanda. In other words, I should calm down and they were entitled to dismiss my concerns because other

people had problems that were much worse. One could say, on this editor's behalf, that she did not entirely ignore me; she addressed an argument to me, even though it would appear to be a strikingly bad one.

My interest in Consolation Arguments is also philosophical. I'm interested in the idea of addressing the nature and strength of emotion by means of arguments, and I'm also interested in issues of relevance. One might argue *Irrelevance* in Consolation arguments, alleging that they commit a fallacy of relevance, given that C's suffering is one thing and A's another. Alternately, one could argue *Positive Relevance* in such cases on the grounds that A's suffering is properly put in perspective by the argument. A third possibility is to claim *Negative Relevance* on the grounds that the premises count against the conclusion because the fact that C has suffered should invite more, and not less, depression on A's part.

In ancient times what I have called the Consolation Argument was referred to as the argument that "you are not the only one." Democritus is said to have comforted the king of Persia in a time of bereavement by telling him he was not alone in having suffered this kind of loss. One idea here was that it might be useful to *distract* oneself by thinking of somebody else's problems. This comment about *distract* suggests *irrelevance* of the other person's suffering to one's own; such irrelevance can be psychologically useful since the distracting case soothes one's mood. Cicero referred to this kind of argument in a reflection he wrote for himself when he was desperate both about his career and about loss of a beloved daughter. Cicero commented that such arguments were much used and sometimes helpful, though often not well-received. He thought they would be more helpful if accompanied by an explanation of how other suffering people had coped with their grief and loss. One can say the same about many weak arguments; they improve if you add something good.

From Epictetus, we have this version of the Consolation Argument:

Someone's child is dead, or his wife. There is no one would not say,
'It's the lot of a human being.' But when one's own dies, immediately it is,
'Alas! Poor me!' But we should have remembered how we feel when we
hear of the same thing about others.

In other words, we should put our sorrow in perspective by appreciating that bad things happen to other people too (White 1983, #26).

Argument and Emotion

One might allege that there is a systematic problem about Consolation Arguments before we even arrive at issues of relevance, because emotional states are not voluntary and not rationally amendable. According to this objection, Consolation Arguments presuppose that people can voluntarily amend their emotional states, which is not true, and because they presuppose, practically, something that is not true, they have no real purpose to serve. There is a reply to this objection, I think. Emotions are subject to *indirect voluntary control* even in contexts in which they are not subject to *direct voluntary control*. For example, a person who becomes cognitively convinced that her fear of flying is both irrational and a serious handicap to her career might seek therapeutic assistance or other relevant experience with a view to ridding herself of her fear. She cannot eliminate her fear by *fiat* but she can work to overcome it over

time. Arguments to the effect that the fear was irrational and was a handicap could play a central role in her deciding to do that. And we can say the similar things for other emotions.

In Appeals to Pity and Fear, expressions of or descriptions of emotion or emotion-warranting situations are found in the premises and there is an attempt to exploit those emotional elements in order to gain assent to a conclusion. Although emotion plays a role in the Consolation Argument, its role there is quite different from that in Appeals to Pity or Fear, because the intended effect is not to exploit emotion but rather to diminish it. B argues that X, which depresses A, should be deemed by A to be less depressing on the grounds that Y, which is just as bad as X or worse, has been experienced by another person, C. B is attempting to console A by reminding him of C's case. In their use of *analogy* between A's suffering and that of C, Consolation Arguments seem to bear some similarity to analogical arguments of the 'Two Wrongs' type. The arguer invites the inference that the case at hand is *better* than it seems because some other case is *worse*.

Douglas Walton explores such argumentative devices as Appeals to Pity and Fear, describing these as arguments in which there is an attempt to shift the balance of evidence toward a conclusion by appeal to the emotional state of the audience. Walton claims, "There is nothing wrong or fallacious *per se* with appeals to emotion in argument. Emotion should not be (categorically) opposed to reason, even though emotion can go wrong or be exploited in some cases" (Walton 1992, 257). Walton says that when emotional appeals are fallacious "the powerful appeal to an emotion" is "used to get an audience to accept a prejudiced, one-sided, or biased point of view without looking too carefully at relevant evidence in a more balanced way." The emotion is exploited to achieve a more dogmatic attitude (toward the conclusion, presumably) in which bias is hardened, and emotion has a greater role than it should have. Nevertheless, Walton advises, emotional appeals may be "reasonable and nonfallacious" and may have positive value in demonstrating empathy or expressing solidarity. But this does not help to resolve the issue of whether Consolation Arguments should be regarded as reasonable or as fallacious.

One might say all such arguments are out of place and useless because there is no point in arguing about emotions: people just feel things or do not and reasons, evidence, and arguments have nothing to do with the matter. On this view, all Consolation Arguments are based on a false presumption. But this objection does not hold because there are connections between emotion and belief that allow for the amending of emotional states by means of arguments. Many emotions are directed toward things or events characterized in some particular way and, accordingly, presuppose beliefs or judgments. For example, a person who is sad about his daughter's miscarriage believes she has had a miscarriage. If not, he cannot be sad about this, though he may be sad for some other reason.

Irving Thalberg distinguished emotions with objects from emotions without objects; generalized depression or free-floating anxiety would fall in the latter category. Of emotions with objects, Thalberg (1964) noted that many have propositional commitments. Thalberg carefully distinguished the *object* of an emotion from its *cause*, offering the example of a man who fears that a rhinoceros will chase him across Central Park. If there's no rhinoceros around, this man's fear is unfounded, which is not to say that it is uncaused. Whatever the cause of his emotion might be, a rhino is not it. When an emotion has an object, it is typically tied logically to thoughts and beliefs about that object. In such a case, if someone refutes the relevant presupposition, the emotion will disappear. The case of the rumored miscarriage is a simple example of a presupposed *belief* being refuted. But *evaluations* are also relevant to emotions,

which may shift if relevant judgments of value are amended. The man might discover, for instance, that although his daughter did have a miscarriage, her miscarriage could be deemed a good thing overall, because she has, in undergoing medical treatment, discovered an underlying condition indicating that continuing the pregnancy would have posed a substantial risk to her life. All this is simply to say that emotions characteristically presuppose beliefs and evaluative judgments and, since beliefs and evaluative judgments are amendable on the basis of argument, such emotions are also amendable on the basis of argument.

In fact, there can be many questions and arguments about emotions that we feel and express. We can ask whether an emotion, *E*, is fitted to its object. An emotion *E* is fitted to its object if that object is the kind of thing in response to which *E* would be an appropriate emotion. (If one finds a nuclear attack fearsome, that's fitting.) We can also ask whether it is prudent for a person to feel *E*, in the circumstances in which he does feel that way. We can ask whether it is morally good, or right, for him to feel *E*, given that he does. In a recent article Justin D'Arms and Daniel Jacobson (2000) describe such questions and argue that there is a tendency for moral considerations to take up all the evaluative space when they are raised. D'Arms and Jacobson claim that people tend to give too much weight to moral considerations and speak of a Moralistic Fallacy in this connection. They argue persuasively that whether *E fits its object* is different from the question of whether it is *prudent*, or *moral* to feel, express, or act upon the emotion *E*. A joke could be *funny* even though it is imprudent to laugh at it. When I was preparing the first draft of this paper in the spring of 2002, the Pope issued a statement on sexual abuse by some members of the Catholic clergy. Among other things, he said that the offenders were infected by a *mysterium iniquitatis*. I found this comment hilarious and felt amused – but given the suffering of victims and the seriousness of the overall problem, many would argue that my response was immoral, and it would have been imprudent to express it.

We can also usefully distinguish between feeling an emotion, expressing that emotion verbally, and acting on it. For example, one might feel sad without expressing that verbally or otherwise acting on one's sorrow; one might feel sad and verbally complain but not take any further action; or one might feel sad, complain verbally, and take some further action based on one's feelings. Correspondingly, we might want to distinguish versions of the Consolation argument. We could imagine B seeking to console A in the sense of actually trying to say things that will lead A to feel better. Alternately, B might really be getting tired of listening to A and want A to stop complaining about how awful he feels, whether or not A actually feels better. Or B might be using the argument to dissuade A of some course of action he is about to take because of the sadness or depression he feels. It is the first sort of context I'm concentrating on here, the context in which B is seeking to amend A's feelings by offering him a Consolation Argument.

The distinctions drawn by D'Arms and Jacobson allow for the possibility that grief might be fitting as a response to some situation even though on some occasions it might be imprudent or immoral or unpatriotic to feel and express it.

Writing about "Melancholic Epistemology," George Graham (1990) maintains that although depression and pessimistic thinking may be illogical, they are not necessarily so. One may be in a situation to which sorrow and depression are entirely fitting responses. Graham considers several such cases. One is that of a person in a concentration camp, who expects to die painfully and has already seen several family members meet such deaths; another, that of a dancer who has met with a serious accident and is paralyzed from the neck down. While such persons might fare better in the world if they could rally from their depression or grief and "snap

out of it" -- or at least refrain from complaining or bothering others about their problems -- there is no denying that their sadness or depression *fits* their situations. When people feel sad or depressed in such cases, it is not because they have made mistakes in logic or factual or evaluative errors about themselves and their circumstances. Applying the terminology of D'Arms and Jacobson here, we might say that insisting that people should snap out of it when they feel sorrow or depression is to mistakenly conflate the issue of the *usefulness* or *prudence* of an emotional response with that of its *fittingness* to its object. Such a conflation may underlie some Consolation Arguments.

As Hume famously said, explaining his account of sympathy, "the minds of men are mirrors to one another." We tend to pick up moods from other people. Some of our efforts to get other people to cheer up are no doubt motivated by empathy and well-intentioned concern but some may also be motivated in part by the fact that when we have to be around other people who feel awful, we begin to feel rather awful ourselves. But none of this tells us whether Consolation Arguments are fallacious due to errors of relevance.

Contexts

In several recent works, Douglas Walton has suggested that the interpretation and evaluation of an argument should vary, depending on the context in which that argument is used. In a recent work on argument structure, for example, Walton (1996) lists the following sorts of contexts, or 'dialogues:' (a) the critical discussion; (b) the negotiation; (c) the inquiry; (d) the deliberation; (e) the quarrel; (f) information-seeking; (g) a context in which an expert is being interviewed; and (h) a pedagogical context. In an earlier work on emotion in argument (1992) Walton offered a similar list.

One might question aspects of these lists. For example, why is information seeking distinguished from consulting an expert? Why could the latter not be a sub-case of the former? Similarly, why did Walton at one point distinguish scientific inquiry from other types of inquiry? Again, might it not be a sub-case? Walton himself seems to recognize that there may be questions about his distinctions. He mentions that the boundaries between these different sorts of context are not always definite; people can cross from one to another, often confusing themselves and others along the way; and that people are not always clear what sorts of discussion they are having.

My sense is that Consolation Arguments might be used in several of the contexts Walton seeks to distinguish. A is sorrowful or depressed and B is trying to lessen A's grief. It seems slightly implausible to think of such occasions as contexts of *critical discussion* in which B is trying to rationally persuade A of the truth of some proposition, and where A and B in adversarial roles in that discussion. One might defend such an interpretation by saying that the adversariality of critical discussions need not be pronounced. Alternately, one might regard A and B as conducting a kind of joint *inquiry* as to whether other people (C) have indeed suffered more than A and whether and how such suffering might serve to diminish A's grief. Another possibility, within the framework Walton puts forward, is that one might imagine the Consolation Argument occurring in a context of *expert consultation*: the sad or depressed person, A, is consulting the expert, B, a context that suggests itself if one is willing to categorize therapists as experts. Or, considering that people sometimes direct Consolation Arguments to themselves when reflecting on their circumstances and attitudes, one might say that such

arguments are used in contexts of *deliberation*. A depressed or sad person begins to pose to herself some form of Consolation Argument and reflects on its merits, asking herself how, if at all, the suffering of other people might serve to diminish her own.

It seems, then, that Consolation Arguments may be used in various of the contexts or 'dialogues' distinguished by Douglas Walton. But if our question is one about the relevance of premises to conclusions in such arguments, it is not clear why such considerations would resolve the question about relevance in Consolation Arguments. Suppose that A, who has lost a child in a custody case, consults a therapist, B, who with the very best of intentions tells A that she should calm down about losing custody because after all, B has another client, C, who is not only being divorced by her husband and unable to care for her children but is, in addition, paralyzed from the neck down. How, if at all, is C's sorry situation relevant to A's problem? We have seen that the context could be one of critical discussion, expert consultation, joint inquiry, or deliberate: we know not which. But that does not settle the relevance issue, which would remain whatever interpretive decision we made about the context.

Relevance

I turn to some recent accounts of relevance to see whether they can offer useful guidance at this point.

1. Pragma-Dialectics

In the pragma-dialectical account developed by Frans van Eemeren and the late Rob Grootendorst (2001) fallacies are understood as violations of rules that are elements of a code of conduct for critical discussions. Within the framework of this theory, if Consolation Arguments were based on fallacious irrelevance, that would be because the move from premise to conclusion would constitute a *hindrance to the reasonable resolution of a disagreement* between the parties A and B in their critical discussion. To use the language of pragma-dialectics, were B's reference to C's suffering in this context to constitute a "speech act that prejudices or frustrates efforts to resolve a difference of opinion, and a violation of a rule for the proper conduct of critical discussions," Consolation Arguments would amount to fallacious argumentation.

To apply the pragma-dialectical model here, we have to assume that when B is trying to console A, A and B are engaged in a critical discussion and within that discussion, they have agreed that what is at issue between them is a particular standpoint to the effect that A's grief should be less than it is. We are advised by the pragma-dialectical theory that the standpoint can be defended only by advancing argumentation that is "related" to it by means of an "appropriate" and "correctly applied" argumentation scheme. Thus the questions of relevance that have been raised here resurface as questions about whether points about C's suffering are *related to* the issue of A's suffering, whether an *appropriate* argumentation scheme is used, and whether that argumentation scheme is *correctly applied* in the case. It is by no means clear that such shifts constitute progress.

More detail is given in Van Eemeren and Grootendorst's *Argumentation, Communication, and Fallacies* (1992). Here Rule 4 for the conduct of discussions states that "A party may defend the standpoint only by advancing argumentation *relating to* that standpoint."

In the explanation of this rule, the authors claim that the argumentation must not be irrelevant to the standpoint; nor may the argument employ means of persuasion that play on the emotions of the audience or seek to parade the qualities of the arguer. Such comments do not resolve our puzzle about relevance in Consolation Arguments. Rule 7 says that "A party may not regard a standpoint as conclusively defended if the defense does not take place by means of an appropriate argumentation scheme that is correctly applied." We might (recalling the fact that Consolation Arguments resemble Two Wrongs Arguments, which are commonly deemed fallacious) speculate that Consolation Arguments *inappropriately* apply reasoning from *similarity or analogy*, but there is nothing here to guide us on the point and in any event, we would be going outside the official parameters of pragma-dialectical theory in doing this. Rule 8 says, "In his argumentation, a party may only use arguments that are logically valid or capable of being validated by making explicit one or more unexpressed premises." This rule raises the hoary problem of missing premises but again gives no substantive guidance. One might wish to amend Consolation Arguments with some proposed 'missing premise,' said to be *implicit* in the original version. Such a premise might be of the type, 'If a person suffers less than some other people do, that person should not feel sad about his or her suffering.' Or perhaps, 'If a person suffers less than some other people do, that person should feel less sad than he does about his or her suffering.' Then the Consolation Argument would contain no flaw of relevance. We would face instead the task of determining whether the reconstruction was appropriate and whether the inserted 'missing premise' was true or rationally acceptable in the context of the discussion. The explanatory comments for Rule 8 in *Argumentation, Communication, and Fallacies* refer to necessary and sufficient conditions and part-whole issues and do not relate usefully to our problems about consolation. Even if one accepts the pragma-dialectical rules for conducting a discussion, they do not seem helpful here.

2. Walton

In a work entitled *A Pragmatic Theory of Fallacy* (1995) Walton comments that there are various different *argumentation schemes* and that to these, various critical questions are attached. A claim – call it X -- is relevant to a contested conclusion being defended by one of those schemes if X answers one of those attached critical questions. On this approach, if we knew what sort of argumentation scheme was being used in Consolation Arguments and we also knew what critical questions were attached to it, we might be able to answer our query. But the problem is, we don't know such things.

As elsewhere, in this work Walton construes arguments in contexts of dialogue. He says, "Any argument or other move in an argumentation is relevant to the extent that it *fits into that type of dialogue as an appropriate move*" (Walton 1995, 163). A move may be dialectically relevant either by being locally relevant (one claim, X, supports some other claim, Y, within the dialogue) or by being globally relevant (this would seem to mean claim X supports a claim Z, which is the main conclusion at stake in the dialogue). Furthermore, making the claim X must be a type of move that is appropriate to the sort of dialogue in which the participants are engaged.

Discussing relevance, Walton considers a truly wonderful example from the Canadian House of Commons, in which Sheila Copps, at that time a member of the Liberal Opposition, criticized the Mulroney government's bill to eliminate Family Allowance payments. Copps based many of her comments on a scandal about incompetent inspections that had allowed cans of rotting tuna to be available for sale in Canadian supermarkets. Commenting on her rhetorical shifts, Walton

offers the observation that the tuna fish issue was not *dialectically relevant* to the family allowance debate because "the particular issue of the tuna fish, even if it could be resolved, *would seem to carry little or no weight in influencing anyone reasonably* to vote for or against the Family Allowance Act." Copps alleged that tainted tuna and family allowance cuts were connected because government callousness was the cause of both. And besides, poor families had to survive by eating tuna. Thus, Copps said, there was no red herring in the tuna. Commenting, Walton, claimed that such connections were *not substantial enough* to make the issue of the tuna *relevant* to the House discussion of family allowance policy. In his view, Copps was merely seeking to exploit the scandal of the rotting tuna to attack the Mulroney government.

These comments strike me as entirely sensible. Still, there is a problem. Walton does not seem to need, or to use, his own theoretical apparatus in order to generate this account of the tuna comments. The context of the House debate was clearly an adversarial one, but Walton does not advise whether the turbulent discussion should count as a critical discussion or amounts to a quarrel. (It strikes me as containing elements of both.) Nor does Walton tell us what rules should apply to this 'dialogue,' apart from rules of the House of Commons itself. He seems to base his comments on his own good sense rather than on his theories about dialogue contexts, argumentation schemes with attached critical questions, and different types of relevance. By the end of the discussion, Walton has not only mentioned local, global, and dialectical relevance, but indirect, topic, and probative relevance as well, and I begin to lose myself in the web of possibilities. Nor have I found any systematic guidance with reference to the Consolation Arguments.

Another Approach

In order to think about anything we need to rely on our sense of relevance and irrelevance and that fact, I suspect, explains why it is so very difficult to say anything that is both general and useful about relevance itself. In my text, *A Practical Study of Argument* (Govier 2001) I comment that relevance is such a basic concept in thinking that it is difficult to pin it down with an exact definition. (Though some have regarded that view as an escape from responsibility, it may gain in plausibility from the relative unhelpfulness of the accounts just considered.) I first define positive relevance of claim X to claim Y as obtaining if and only if the truth of X *counts in favour of* the truth or rational acceptability of Y. I then define negative relevance of claim X to claim Y as obtaining if and only if the truth of X *counts against* the truth or rational acceptability of Y. And I say that claim X is irrelevant to claim Y if and only if it is neither positively relevant nor negatively relevant to Y. Clearly the explanatory weight here shifts to the notion of "counting in favour of," which is obviously far from precise. I comment that context can make a difference to judgments about relevance and offer further examples to illustrate that point. But I do not handle contextual issues in quite the way Walton does. For me, it is not so much a matter of distinguishing *types* of context, contrasting inquiry with deliberation or expert consultation, or a critical discussion with a quarrel. Rather, I give examples in which in the light of some specific fact or presumption, Z, about a context in which Y is being discussed, the claim X gains relevance to Y.

My account is couched in relatively simple terms because it was developed for a textbook. One might deem it primitive on the grounds that it attempts to address relevance in a proposition-to-proposition framework, without reference to different types of context or dialogue

or rules for the conduct of discussions; note, however, that those considerations have not proven their usefulness with relation to our puzzle about relevance in Consolation Arguments. One might allege that such an account as mine will, in the end, leave us appealing to various *ad hoc* considerations or even simply to our 'intuitions.' To the latter criticism, it would appear that I could reply "*tu quoque*." But it would be nice to do better. Since time and space are running out, let me come to the point.

One who argues from a premise to a conclusion is committed to the claim that that premise is positively relevant to that conclusion. If that claim is contested, he or she faces the challenge of showing that, and how, the premises are relevant to the conclusion. Those not convinced can dispute specific points. A critic who alleges irrelevance faces the challenge of showing how and why the premises are irrelevant. Disputes about relevance cannot be answered by a purely intuitive appeal. By themselves, intuitions are insufficient and in this case as elsewhere, different people are likely to have different ones. When issues of relevance are explored, the arguer and the critic should defend their judgments in further arguments. In such arguments, there is room for premises drawn from theories about pragmatics, dialectics, dialogues, contexts, argument reconstruction, and implicit premises. But there is also room for substantive considerations about the relation this premise, or this sort of premise, bears on this conclusion or this sort of conclusion.

My inclination is to find irrelevance in Consolation Arguments as described here. Essentially the reason is that A's emotional state depends on A's beliefs, evaluations, and circumstances, not on those of C. When A is feeling sad, if B wants to console him or her, B should attend to the case at hand and really address what A is feeling. That is to say, if B is going to consider facts and use arguments in his efforts to console A, those facts and arguments should be such that they tend to confirm or to disconfirm the relevant beliefs and evaluative judgments made by A. Typically, those beliefs and judgments are about the object of A's own emotion and not about the circumstances and feelings of some other person, C. (*Typically it is not C who is the object of A's emotions so facts about C will not show whether those emotions are fitting or not.*) If B is trying to console A, B should attend specifically to the content and intensity of A's own emotion.

Putting this point in more psychological terms, we might say that if B shifts to considering the miseries of C, he is in so doing not acknowledging A's own particular feelings, thereby failing to communicate empathy for A and suggesting that A is not entitled to as feel sad as he does. Irrelevance is felt by A as lack of acknowledgement and even as insult. The shift from A's problems to those of C suggest that C's case is more legitimate or important than A's, which is likely to be frustrating to A. B suggests that A's own feelings are unfitting or inappropriate, or unworthy of attention in their own right because of their comparative significance with regard to C's concerns. This is a shift of topic and because it is, it is fair to say that the Consolation Argument involves a mistake of relevance. Its premise is not even about A or the object of A's emotion; it is about C, who is another person entirely.

There is a qualification to be made here, though, and I think it is an interesting and important one. What I have just said depends on A's feelings *not being implicitly comparative in the first place*. I have presumed that, typically, C and others were *not* the objects of A's emotion – that A was feeling depressed about his own situation in particular, and in itself. But that is not always the case, and when it is not, the judgment of irrelevance may be altered. Often the judgments on which our emotions depend are implicitly comparative because they have a decided '*why me?*' element. The notion that we have been unfairly singled out for bad treatment

or bad luck is characteristic of many of our emotions – of which resentment is perhaps the most outstanding example. A's grief may presuppose beliefs that are comparative in crucial ways. A may feel singled out by fate, bad luck, or human persecutors to undergo miseries not suffered by others, miseries that she did not deserve. A woman may feel, for example, that she has been unlucky to suffer a chronic disease imposing considerable dietary and lifestyle restrictions; she may believe this situation to be unfair, focusing on the fact that there are millions of other people who do not face such restrictions, all of them seeming to be, in this respect, far more fortunate than she is herself. Or a man may think there is an unfairness in the fact that his children have grown up to be obnoxious and unsuccessful, whereas other people's children have become polite young people advancing in professional careers. When A's feelings are based on the conviction that he or she is unfairly disadvantaged, *as compared to other people*, there is room for relevance of the premises of the Consolation Argument. In such cases, A's feelings are explicitly or implicitly comparative; thus the suffering of others is relevant to A's emotions.

In such cases, by bringing C into the picture, B offers to A the prospect of gaining perspective on his situation and questioning his presumptions about expectations, proportion, and fairness. A may come to recognize that he had tacitly assumed a comparative judgment that can be questioned in the light of B's claims about what C has been going through. Thus, in some Consolation Arguments, allegations of irrelevance can be rebutted. But note where this exception comes from. It certainly does not emerge from the application of formal or general rules; nor does it depend on whether A and B are conducting a critical discussion, an inquiry, a deliberation, or a therapeutic session deemed to be one of expert consultation. It is not a matter of whether there is a rule of discussion that has been violated, or an inappropriate argumentation scheme has been used -- or whether the issue in question concerns topical, local, or global relevance. Rather, the relevance of C's case can be established here because of the nature, and presuppositional structure, of A's feelings. Fundamentally, relevance is a matter of 'aboutness' and A's feelings are what the Consolation Arguments are about.

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